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PRESENT RELIGIOUS TENDENCIES IN INDIA.

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THERE probably never has existed, and there certainly does not now exist, another country about which generalizations are so uncertain and dangerous as that multiform, heterogeneous collection of peoples called India. This statement is true whether, in attempting to make the generalizations, regard is had to any one of several points of view. For the student of ethnology or anthropology this continent still offers almost every conceivable stratum of human evolution, from the dwellers in caves and trees, who come near to the level of so-called "primitive man," to the finest specimens, physically and intellectually, of modern civilization. For the investigator in philology the same thing is true. Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Kolarian, and Dravidian languages, in various forms of modification and stages of development, are still alive in India, and compete with one another and with English, French, Portuguese, and other modern languages, for the patronage of the inhabitants in different parts of this strange land. Of the religions and religious tendencies of India the same difficulty of making general assertions has prevailed for centuries. The difficulty prevails almost undiminished today. Animism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Mohammedanism all flourish there—about as uncompromising and as

little affected by one another as they were two hundred years ago. Contrary to the common impression that Buddhism is extinct in India, more than seven millions of its different sects are registered by the census of 1891. The religions of the Sikh and of the Christian number nearly the same. And under that title, "Brahmanism," which claims five-sevenths of the about 290,000,000 of inhabitants, everything by way of *religious* belief is covered, from the grossest idolatry and devil-worship to the most subtle philosophic pantheism, or agnostic pessimism.

The facts and realities of Indian life are, therefore, not well adapted for hasty generalizations. A score of lifetimes would not suffice to put the observer so into possession of them all as that he could safely estimate in detail the drifts, beliefs, and practices that are *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*. No less time than this would be necessary to investigate even the more important local and relatively limited religious phenomena. Is it strange, then, that the pronouncements of even the more intelligent and observing commissions of investigation, or of the tourists, whether for purposes of pleasure, trade, or lecturing, are usually entitled to confidence in nearly inverse proportion to the extent of the area which they are intended to cover, and the amount of self-confidence with which they are made? Lifelong residents, too, whether engaged in missionary work or in official service, are scarcely more trustworthy, whenever their conclusions are extended much beyond the narrow field with which they have made themselves most intimately familiar.

The insurmountable difficulties in the way of satisfactory generalizations about India are the facts themselves. They are, on the one hand, too diverse, too heterogeneous, too unsuitable for bringing under any common rubrics or universally applicable formulas. But, on the other hand, they are—each group of them—too persistently and doggedly incapable of uniting with one another by way of those processes of compromise, of giving-and-taking, of reciprocal modification, which characterize the modern western civilizations.

An apology and a confession of weakness might properly follow this introductory statement. It is eminently desirable

that the reader should know from the beginning how limited is the measure of adherence which the author expects, or to which he thinks himself entitled. But, since the point of view throughout is to be personal, I may perhaps fitly preface my treatment of the subject with a few words spoken in a not immodest self-defense. The cordial and intimate relations offered to me by the representatives of different grades and classes of religious opinions, the exceptional, and in some instances entirely unique, opportunities enjoyed for friendly intercourse and face-to-face observation, during a stay of only four months in India, cannot properly be disregarded; nor should they be appreciated at other than a fairly high estimate. One persuasion was always with me—the same that I have carried twice to Japan, the land so well known and loved. With all their weird and strange superstitions; with all their seemingly perverse yet subtle speculations; with all their disconcerting mixture of craft, greed, and lust, in conjunction with the most fundamental religious emotions, the natives of India are intensely human—essentially the same men in all most important respects as you and I. *Homo sum* must, then, express the prevailing consciousness with which to observe the worshiper of the sacred cow, the sacred tree, or the toe of his Çankara-āchārya. To every priest who uses his office to gratify more easily his lust, to every poor layman who—to quote the significant Bengali proverb—sees “the god in the procession and sells his cabbages” at the same time, as well as to every wrestler with the problems of the Infinite and his relations (*sic*) to man, or of the nature of *Karma* and the endless life, he who would gain insight in India must always be ready to address himself in the significant declaration of the Hindu philosophy: “*Tat tvam asi*” (“that art thou”). Psychological skill, somehow obtained, is the indispensable propædæutic to the understanding of its religious life, as of all the other manifestations of the life of man.

Two tendencies which are not of today simply or chiefly, but which underlie and control all the civil, social, intellectual, and religious life of the peoples of India, must be noticed first of all. These, however, are not so much particular tendencies,

whether of religious or other kind. They are rather drifts that control all the separate tendencies, great controlling characteristics of the popular temperament and habit that perhaps rest upon a cosmic basis in part; they are gross resultants of the subjective characters of the races that are dominant in the mixture, after being subjected through many generations to the continental environment. One of these is a strongly, and almost unchangeably, conservative tendency. The other would seem to be the exact opposite, and so destructive, of this tendency; for it is a tendency to never-ceasing and uncompromising diversifying of tenets, and to endless hairsplitting, accompanied by much of bickerings, schisms, and strife. The effect of these two tendencies is most potent over all other tendencies, and in its particular manifestations most astonishing. The conservatism of post-Reformation orthodoxy was certainly quite strong enough to satisfy all the reasonable demands of a safe and substantial progress. The splitting up into sects of this same orthodoxy afforded as much variety of means for satisfying different tastes as was desirable; while the disrespect for each other's opinions, and the freedom with which the contestants consigned each other to the limbo of heretics, if not to a yet more awful doom, went quite beyond the limits which are now deemed respectable for the Christian gentleman. But the mixture of stolid and unquestioning adherence to the traditions of the past, both as respects belief and also practice, with a contention over unimportant details that admits of no compromise and tends to wrathful and scornful divisions and subdivisions, which is displayed by the religions of India, taken as a whole, is something far surpassing, it seems to me, anything which can justly be laid to the charge of Christianity, at least in its European development.

In speaking of "present religious tendencies in India," the larger, stronger, and more permanent forces to which reference has just been made must constantly be borne in mind. The ancestral, historical tendencies still constitute the more potent forces; and such they will probably continue to be for an indefinite period of time. For centuries India has been the battleground of differing religions with so-called Brahmanism, the

prevalent religion. For centuries this Brahmanism so-called has itself been a seething pot for many species of nutritious or indigestible vegetables, and savory or ill-smelling herbs. The lower indigenous forms of nature-worship, and no little devil-worship, upon which the purer forms of the northern religion came down, are still about as obvious as they have ever been, and they are little less degraded than they were at the first. The different gods of the one religion are at the present time—if an expression may be pardoned which is borrowed from the somewhat shameless but expressive slang of the current occidental politics and business—"worked for all that they are worth" by their respective genuine devotees or more selfish and hypocritical followers. And yet there is a sort of unity of spirit to the entire religious manifestation of Brahmanism. A kind of odor is always in the nostrils of the looker-on which somewhat resembles that smell of the Orient which is one undefinable mixture of many not easily distinguishable smells. Considered as religious feeling, it is partly worshipfulness mingled with a fear of so missing the mark of the religious life here as to incur added doom in the endless round of lives through which the human soul is destined to pass—the feeling, rather than any definite doctrine, of *Karma*. It is *Karma* that is the supreme power; the merit and demerit of intelligent existence. And this power makes itself most potently *felt*, however lacking in ability the individual may be to give any consistent account of it. Considered as religious belief, Brahmanism is a vague pantheism, either thought out into many subtle, or distorted, or even monstrous forms of speculation, or else unthinkingly accepted and more *felt* than constructed into compacted conceptions—not to say a system of defensible ideas. Considered as social and ethical, however, the religions of India are, above all their other aspects and relations, most potent and uncompromising. For religion here is not, as it is in most Christian communities, an affair which has little or nothing to do with one's domestic life, or associates socially, or social and political or other functions. On the one hand, it cannot be claimed by the most enthusiastic advocate of Brahmanism (or of any of the other religions

of India) that its social and ethical results are comparable, in most respects, with those that permeate the best Christian communities. But, on the other hand, this religion is far more pervasive and controlling than is the Christianity of England or of America. In raiment, and in eating and drinking, in the home and at the club, on the street and in the hospital, in marrying and giving in marriage, in visiting and refraining from all avoidable social intercourse, in the school and the market and the government office, *religion* is the main factor in determining the details of nearly every kind of human relation.

This seemingly variable and yet rigorously fixed, this kaleidoscopic and yet permanent, background it is against which all the current changes in the religious condition of India, whether produced by Christian influences or otherwise, must be viewed. Current changes—and some of them exceedingly important and interesting—certainly exist. But before I speak of those which seemed to me most impressive, I wish to illustrate by reference to several personal experiences what has already been said.

In Bombay, in December, 1899, by the kindness of a wealthy Hindu, Mr. Tribhowandas, I enjoyed the quite unique opportunity of attending an important ceremonial, properly open only to members of the caste. This caste, the "Kapola Bania," is—so my host assured me—"exceedingly orthodox." After the ceremonial, which need not be described at present except to say that it consisted in worshiping the toe of the Çankara-āchārya (or chief religious teacher), in essentially the same manner as that in which we had seen the idols and the sacred cows worshiped the day before, a sermon was preached by him in Sanskrit, and followed, paragraph by paragraph, with a translation in Hindustani. For "substance of doctrine," and making the necessary changes of subject and object, this sermon was similar to thousands of sermons preached by the post-Reformation Protestant orthodox, or by the most high-and-dry Roman Catholic or Episcopalian advocates of the infallibility of the church. The discourse began with praise of the sacred scriptures of the Hindu religion, the Vedas. They are the original, only, and infallible source of all true religion; they point out the way of salvation, and there

is no other way than that which they point out. Whoever walks in this way, and does as the Vedas instruct him, he has the true religion; he is safe. But whoever departs from this way, his religion is false; and he will not attain salvation, but will be punished in this life and in the life to come. But, now, whereas most men are ignorant and cannot understand the Vedas, and so know not the way of salvation, the Brahman knows the way. He gives all his time, his entire life, to these things. He is to be implicitly believed and unquestioningly obeyed; his instructions are to be followed in every particular. He who disobeys the voice of the Brahman, or refuses to follow the way the Brahman directs, he cannot find the way of salvation, but is of necessity ignorant and miserable, both in this life and in the life to come. As to the women, however—but I forbear; and I ask anyone who wishes to understand some of the tendencies which Christianity has to overcome in India to weigh well the force of these fateful words. They show clearly what binds millions of souls in that country to *their* religion; just as millions of souls in other countries have been bound to other religions. And it is as certain, in my judgment, as anything dependent upon the unchanging characteristics of human nature can possibly be, that no substitution of Christianity for Brahmanism can ever take place in India by means of a preaching which, in its spirit and its conception of religion, is not essentially different from this.

What, however, can be more widely different than the following account of the true Hindu religion which, some weeks later, I got in private conversation with the celebrated “ascetic Raja of ——”? A man of high intellectual quality, whose face lights up with pleasant smiles—touched, however, with occasional gleams of sarcasm and tender bitterness—is here. But he is as far from the “religious light” of the Bania caste in his description of the “higher Hinduism” as Schopenhauer’s “World as Will and Idea” is from Quenstedt’s *Systema Theologicum*. All these writings—says the scholarly and devout Raja—the Upanishads, Puranas, and even the most ancient Vedas, are full of admixtures, and contain only occasional truths, with much that is rubbish and erroneous. The true and higher

Hinduism rejects the claims of the Brahmans and the infallibility of any of the sacred scriptures. Even the Vedas are of uncertain origin; and the teachings of the Pundits are of small value. The current revival of the Yoga philosophy is not the true Yoga philosophy; it is gaining few adherents and exercising no worthy influence. The theosophists are more numerous hereabout; but they do not know what they mean and can only captivate silly boys. All is *Māyā*—even the teaching and scheme of the Vedas, and, *a fortiori*, all the Brahmanical philosophy and liturgy. The world is only evil; pain is the fundamental, the universal, the ineradicable experience. The way of utter self-denial is the only way of salvation. To extinguish all desire, all love of self and all interest in self, brings the believer at last to *Nirvāna*.

How shall the honest seeker for truth find his way to what he seeks? No wonder that the answer is hard to give for the intelligent and sincere native of India today, as it has ever been for the intelligent and sincere inquirer, not only for centuries in India, but always and in all lands. Particularly hard is the discovery of religious truth just now there, where the conditions of every sort—intellectual, material, social, and civic—are so difficult and in many ways distressing that sympathy and sympathetic assistance seem the most fitting attitude toward them.

Here let me quote from a letter received in Calcutta and written by one of the most gifted and keen-sighted of the natives:

In the present transition period [he writes] the old spiritual and philosophic molds are being broken up, and western ideals have not yet taken deep root. Our Indian universities have committed the fatal blunder of ignoring the philosophical inheritance of the Indian peoples. It was their business to graft modern philosophic ideals and scientific method on the old stock. But they have begun with a *tabula rasa*, as it were. They import the manufactured products of the West, and in the meantime the prolific philosophic faculty of the Hindu race is dying of inanition and atrophy. The transition from the mediæval to the modern standpoint in Europe has been a normal growth, from within, after all; in India there is a violent gap, an utter breach of continuity in the national life and consciousness; and this has made genuine thinking more or less impossible. We think in counters and symbols, meaningless abstractions, second-hand formulas, and are cut off

from those original experiences of life and nature which are the sole source of scientific and philosophic inspiration.

Now, when we remember that, in the higher and more thoughtful circles of India, as has always been the case and as always will be the case, philosophy and religion are closely and inextricably intertwined, we understand the better the bearing of what my correspondent declared true upon the present religious tendencies of that land.

If further proof is needed of this persistent and almost indefinite tendency to variability, with this variability persistently falling under certain hereditary and generic characteristics of feeling, belief, and social and ethical influences, and just at present all the more accentuated by the period of transition through which the religions of India are passing, such proof is accessible to any candid inquirer. Let him accept with me the invitation of the editor of the ——— and call upon him to talk over religion together in his office. Ascending a dirty, dark, and winding stairway, we shall find our way to a very small and uncomfortable room, from which emanate the influences that are to reform Hinduism and give it, newly regenerated, to the world as the only powerful and true religion for all mankind. An emaciated man, with the physical appearance of one far gone in tuberculosis, and with a mixture of conceit, fanaticism, and craft in his bearing, is the one whom we seek. He promptly begins to complain of the powerlessness of all religions, especially of Christianity, to accomplish anything ethical and practical by way of bringing man into communion with God. Particularly worthless is this new claimant to be a world-religion in a land so well supplied with worthier claimants. While inquiring into your views as to what Christianity can offer, the man makes upon you the impression that there is not the slightest reality or moral earnestness in his attitude of inquiry. But when inquired of as to what *his peculiar form* of Hinduism provides to meet the religious needs of man, he glows with a pathetic earnestness. And when the interchange of views is over, he follows us wearily to the head of the stairs, and listlessly bids us good-by with the remark: "We Bengalis

have a religion of our own; it is far better for us than is your Christianity."

From the dingy office of this editor, who is fanatically advocating a new form of Hinduism, we will go to the magnificent drawing-room of a wealthy Maharaja, whose ancestor was outcasted and compelled to form a new caste of Brahmanism. For this ancestor—whether voluntarily or on compulsion, the tradition is divided—committed the unpardonable sin of smelling Mohammedan roast beef; and therefore he and his descendants have been ever since doomed to pay high prices for their sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, and for the Brahmans to act as the family's priests. Next let us visit the house of Dr. ———, an educated gentleman, an orthodox Hindu, and a Rai Bahadin by favor of the British government in India. He, with undoubted sincerity, speaks, with the feeling of a true Christian, of the recent loss of his wife and favorite son, of his broken ambition and courage, and of the alone bright and sustaining hope of a reunion with his loved ones. Yet nothing could tempt him, he assures us, to allow a member of his family to enter the house of the outcasted Maharaja we have just left.

After these calls, if time permits, we may pay a visit to the three or four different and irreconcilable portions of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj: to that called Ahdi (or "True"), which derives itself in direct line from Rammohun Roy through his chosen successor Maharshi Debendranath Tagore; or to either of the two branches which regard Kesub Chunder Sen as their divine father; or to that Brahma Samaj which is called Sadhara (or "Common"), and which is perhaps most popular and influential with the students—resembling, as it does very closely, Felix Adler's Ethical Society in this country. Or if you wish, when in Bombay, to find a similar representation of the Calcutta attempts to *reform* Hinduism, you must seek the Prarthana Samaj; for how could a Hindu reformer in the Bombay presidency consent to take the title for his "New Dispensation" from his confrère in the Calcutta presidency, however closely similar their thoughts or methods of reform might be? Among these men will be found some who have been baptized with a practically Christian

formula into this "New Dispensation" of the ancient and ancestral religion; and some who talk of the place and power of Christ in their faith and life in a manner which would secure them unhesitating admission into most of the orthodox churches in America. Yet these men may be as far as the members of the Kapola Bania caste from willingness wholly to abandon their ancestral faith for the acceptance of a religion which they regard as, in many respects, essentially the same with their own, and, in other respects, not only alien, but also inferior.

All these varieties of the one religion, however, are obviously for the thoughtful, for the "good few" only. For that which is between the highest and the lowest one may go, for example, to the garden where the "holy man of Benares" lived, received the homage of visitors, and gathered their autographs; Swami Paribraj-āchārya Bhaskaranand Saraswati was his "religious" name. Simple-hearted, sincere, devout, but not very intelligent, he believed sincerely in his own divinity; but did not exploit it overmuch for purposes of gain. Here in a shrine sits, in the characteristic attitude of the living, the marble effigy of the departed saint; and although scarcely a decade has passed since his death, he is already deified and worshiped as a god; while his successor has set up in the business of Swami—obviously "in it for all it may be worth."

If one is an adherent of Brahmanism and belongs to the great multitude of worshipers, one can pay one's devotion and get good for one's soul at the "monkey temple" near by. Here, however, one who has no sympathy with this strange human longing to stand right with the invisible powers will find the monkey much the most interesting part of the totality—building and surroundings, material and human. Or one may wander through the winding lanes of this "holy city;" they are not more than five or six feet wide, are dank and slippery with the urine and dung of goats and cows. They are crowded with animals and with human beings, noisy with the chaffer of trade and with the gossip and wrangling of worshipers. If one gets a glimpse into the temples themselves, the sights are yet more

repulsive; and what goes on unseen betimes within these temples is worst of all. And down in the ghat, when the sun is rising and the bodies of the dead are being brought to be washed in the sacred river and then burned on its banks, one will find more *pice* and gifts of floral sort at the shrine of the goddess of smallpox or of cholera than anywhere else. Devil-worship, virtually, is this. But why should those who would propitiate the divinity and keep away that which they have most to dread, if unenlightened, do differently from this?

What then, let us ask ourselves, must be the present religious tendencies of a people, the great underlying currents of whose life have flowed for centuries in such directions as these? If the individual remains within the main current, no matter how near its rather ill-defined outer limits, which is, nevertheless, carrying along more than two hundred millions of his fellow-men, he may believe and practice (unless he transgress the social customs of the caste) pretty nearly as he will. He may form a new subdivision of the religion, if he is able to devise some modification of the ancient tenets or speculations that shall prove attractive to a band of disciples. If he has money to buy priests and sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, and to support them all, he may—although with much discomfort—break with all the castes and form a new caste of his own. But if the native of India goes from any one to any other of the influential religions of the land, he severs all ties of every sort—ancestral, domestic, social, friendly, religious; he carries with him, it is likely, nothing but such small share of personal security and civic rights as the British government is able to support. Particularly is it true that becoming an out-and-out Christian means the passage from everything that is, in faith and in practice, in the life of the family and of society, wrought into every fiber and cell of the brain, and into every drop of blood, as *homelike* and most temporally and eternally precious. The convert from the higher circles of Brahmanism to Christianity becomes a despised and distrusted alien and stranger.

What is so emphatically true of the forceful influence which the religion of Brahmanism exercises over the millions of India

is true, only in a somewhat less degree, of Mohammedanism. And although the same truth is less obvious and forceful among the Jains, the Sikhs, and the remaining Buddhists in India, it is true of them also. Most notable for their freedom from the bonds of caste and prejudice, and, in respect of their social and business relations, most fusible, as it were, with modern and occidental beliefs and ways, are the Parsis of the Bombay presidency. Some of the most influential of them have sent their sons to be fitted for the university by the fathers of the St. Francis Xavier College; and they are, in general, most intimately associated with the foreign and Christian residents of India in various forms of charitable and reform movements.

It is, then, this elastic firmness, this variable conservatism, which constitutes the one predominatingly influential tendency of the religion of India today. It is a present tendency which has the momentum of centuries behind it; and in its favor all the hopes and fears that have to do with the future, both for time in this world and for the invisible and eternal.

But, as has already been said, India is feeling the force of certain more recent tendencies introduced from abroad by Christian civilization. These tendencies are really and somewhat powerfully, though, of necessity, slowly and rather indirectly in many cases, modifying its religious life. Of such present religious tendencies, although they are all to be interpreted as seen against the shifty yet essentially unaltered background already described, I notice the following four. Two of these four are negative, but two are positive. The former, in all periods when the religions of a vast multitude are changing their form, are simply inevitable. They are in some respects deeply to be regretted and even feared. Both of the positive tendencies, however, are to be recognized with a sympathetic pleasure, although one of them is only indirectly to be traced to Christianity, and is even opposed by some adherents of the Christian cause.

First: There is undoubtedly a very considerable and a growing tendency, especially among the younger educated Hindus (the *babus* of the various colleges and other schools, native and

foreign), to agnosticism and indifference in religious matters. This tendency, as has already been indicated, is common to all great transitional periods in the religious history of any people—especially in places where there already exists a considerable degree of intellectual and social cultivation. Japan has been passing through such a transitional period with an astonishing rapidity and with that extreme thoroughness with which this nation has thrown itself into all the currents of modern civilization. India is entering upon a corresponding period—more slowly and secretly, on account of its dread of breaking with its own social and religious past, and of imperiling the future condition of the souls of its multitudes. But India is certainly feeling the disintegrating power over its own religions of foreign religious beliefs and practices.

Moreover, the tendency to agnosticism and irreligion among the natives of India is just now undoubtedly much accentuated by British commercial, educational, and official influences. The officer of the British government in India is very properly forbidden to take sides in any religious controversy, or to exercise his authority or influence as an officer in the behalf of Christianity. By example, and in other indirect ways, some of the official classes—notably some of the higher official classes—have done much to commend a purer religious life and a nobler and more rational faith to the needy multitudes of India. But this is by no means the case with all of the British official influence in India. The same thing is true of the more unrestricted influence of the classes engaged in trade or in education. In some cases foreign merchants from Christian nations commend Christianity to the natives by their dealings and by their lives; but in other cases the commercial influence is decidedly unfavorable to all religion. Thus it is also with the teachers in the government schools. Subtle and almost irresistible influences from the environment account for a part of this. These influences are—in a very partial way, to be sure—indicated by the wit of the Scotchman who explained the differences between his life at home and in India as follows: “I dinna gang till the kirk every sabba day; but I tak my bath every morning.”

Especially strong is this negative influence from certain teachers in the government schools who, without explicit attempt, or even perhaps consciousness of what they are doing, destroy all manner of religious belief in their pupils—whether by use of textbook, by verbal instructions, or by example.

I found all classes of seriously religious people, native and foreign, admitting and deploring the spread among the younger educated natives of this agnostic and irreligious tendency. Especially in northern India there was general agreement that the *babu* of today is less sober in mind and less trustworthy, morally and religiously, than his predecessor of a generation ago. The earnest Christian teacher attributes the change, perhaps, to a lack of dogmatic positiveness in the prevalent teaching of his own or some other sect. The serious Hindu bewails it as one of the evil effects of a foreign religion, which, being in itself much lacking in power to influence the life, has seduced the native youths from the safe paths of their ancestral faith without providing any other guide to their faltering and uncertain steps. And then there is everywhere the too obvious greed of the Christians resident in India for wealth or for official preferment. It has infected, say the Hindus, our own youth. The believers in a form of the Christian religion that lays high claims to absolute authority agree with the most orthodox of the Hindus as to the defects of Protestant Christianity. In a conversation with a Roman Catholic archbishop, who has been more than a half-century in India, after agreeing with me in the statement that the agnosticism and atheism of many of the present generation of *babus* formed a worse condition than their former Hinduism, he quoted with approval the saying of an Englishwoman, Lady —: “India will all ultimately become either Catholic or agnostic.”

This tendency to agnosticism and irreligion is not, of course, to be charged to Christian missions; nor by any means wholly to the influence of those who are Christians only in name. It is an influence with which all the religions of India will be obliged to reckon; it will be more and more destructive of much that was good, as well as of much that was bad, in the older forms of faith.

How it will ultimately affect the substitution of Christianity, in any form of modification consistent with its essential and unchanging content, for the higher forms of Hinduism, Mohammedanism, or Parseeism, I do not believe it is possible at present for any one confidently to predict.

A second tendency affecting the present religious condition of India is that toward a disintegration of the bonds of priestly domination and authority, and even of the hitherto all-powerful influence of caste. Brahmanism is distinctly a *priestly* religion; in India today, as for many centuries in the past, the people are "priest-ridden"—more sorely and onerously, perhaps, than they ever were in the darkest days of Italy or of Spain. Numerous attempts, either local or widely extended, have been made in the past to throw off this domination of those who, as the sermon of the Çankara-āchārya of the Kapola Bania (a "very orthodox") caste informed us, are the only possible way to salvation for the multitudes of men. And especially is the power of the priests over the *women* endangered; and there is where their chief secret of power has ever been and still is. Without priestly sanction and assistance, woman in India can realize no good, whether in this world or in the life to come. There are millions, especially of the younger and middle-aged men, who today are quite ready, so far as mental preparation is concerned, to break with the domination of the Brahman and with the supremacy of the system of caste. But for the individual such a break is still apt to be expensive; there are the women and the children, and the priest holds them, for all manner of temporal and eternal welfare, under his sway. But the keys of heaven and hell are destined to slip from his grasp.

For, in spite of all efforts to prevent it, the breach is widening; the stupendous ancestral force of the Brahman, which is still nearly the whole of what is most obvious to the popular religion, is weakening and giving way. Two experiences of mine were most suggestive in respect of this matter. I shall not easily forget with what an air a wealthy Hindu, for an entire morning, showed me over the burning *ghat*, and the long series of temples with their sacred tank, which were *his very own*

possession. The various priests were ordered to exhibit to the guest all that he desired to see; to worship the idols and the sacred cows for his instruction. The holy men, the Yogis, took down their matted hair for his amusement; and so did they smoke to order their dole of Indian hemp. At another time and place a well-to-do lawyer was showing me with unconcealed pride over his well-appointed house. Among the other appurtenances thereto was the room where the family Brahman was seated alone, performing the religious functions of the household. His sacred personage was displayed with the same air of ownership as that with which the dairy and the office of the "master of the house" had previously been displayed. It was explained that the Brahman was merely a convenience; he was given so much rice and so many *pice* daily, to do the religion for the family. The owner of all, then, need no longer bother himself about such matters, but could attend exclusively to his legal and business affairs.

Trifling but significant indications for one who can master their meaning constantly bear witness to the increased strength of this tendency of the Hindus in India to throw off some of the bondage of caste. The prohibition placed upon traveling abroad, for example, has already been softened, and will soon have to be abandoned. In Bombay I was shown the "Cosmopolitan Club," where rather more than one hundred Hindus of four or five different castes are trying to cultivate the spirit of unity, *à l'Anglaise*, by playing billiards and drinking whisky and soda together! In Madura I took tea at a club of high-caste Brahmans, who do not even allow soda water in bottles to be brought on the premises, for fear of exciting suspicion; but who have assisted the foreign missionaries in a street-preaching campaign against intemperance. Exceedingly interesting and courteous gentlemen were these; and although they did not go so far as to eat and drink *with us*, they sat around in friendly converse, while some of the gentlemen of our party served the ladies with biscuit and tea. When a young native who entered the Convocation Hall at one of my lectures in Bombay, without removing his *native* shoes (to wear "native" shoes in the house

was not permissible under the old etiquette, while foreign shoes need not be removed), was rebuked by the vice-chancellor for his breach of courtesy, he replied: "Why? we do not even take off our shoes in the temples now." These may be straws, indeed, but they show to anyone who understands even superficially the characteristics of the native life in India which way a strong current of wind is setting.

There is, moreover, in India evidence of a tendency toward the reform of the ancient, native religions, as respects both their doctrines and also the domestic and social ethics so closely allied with these doctrines. This is a third tendency, positive and reconstructive, rather than negative and destructive; it should, I think, be hopefully and sympathetically recognized by the student of the present religious condition of this land. Reform of religion is, indeed, nothing new in India. Within Brahmanism itself there have originated during the centuries of its existence a number of significant attempts at reform. Jainism and Buddhism are the two most important instances of such attempts. The former was of the more negative character—a revolt against the priestly domination and sacrificial practices of Brahmanism. The latter was a positive and, on the whole, most beneficent attempt to bring the principles of hope and pity to bear upon the daily life of the suffering multitudes of the people. But Jainism and Buddhism have long since lost whatever power they may once have possessed to work important religious reforms in the faith and life of India. They are not, however, by any means the only instances of the good Spirit working from within for the improvement of the existing religious conditions—the true Light "that lighteth every man coming into the world." From the roof of the beautiful new museum at Jaipur one can look down into the gardens of a monastery where a Protestant and reforming Hindu sect, very radical and locally influential, was founded by Dada, a later contemporary of Martin Luther. Some of his one hundred and fifty-two disciples left a poem of about five thousand stanzas (still extant, although only in manuscript), in which the teachings of the master are given in detail. Dada rejected the authority of the Brahmins,

disbelieved in the efficacy of ritual and of sacrifice, and derided idol-worship. He advocated a religion that should bring the soul of every believer into divine communion, and should purify, elevate, and comfort the daily life. Thus all over India, in spots at least, there have always been those effectively interested in the purification of the Hindu religious faith and life.

One of the most valuable and important results of the spreading of truly Christian influences is felt in the improvement of the religions with which Christianity comes into conflict or contact. Indeed, in the case of an ancient and elaborate civilization, and especially among the more thoughtful classes, unless these classes become quite agnostic and irreligious, the improvement rather than the abandonment of their own ancestral religion is likely to be one of the most important results of Christian missions. No observing person who has been twice in Japan within the present decade—once at the beginning and again at the end—can fail to note the quickening and elevating of the tone of Buddhism in that land. Thus in India, too, all the greater religions prevalent there—especially Hinduism, Mohammedanism, and Parseeism—have been stimulated by Christian influences to put forth their inherent power to reform themselves. It is true that this beneficent, indirect influence of Christianity is usually most grudgingly admitted, if admitted at all, by the advocates of these religions. But it is also true that the influence, though so often indirect and so largely unrecognized, is most real.

It must be confessed that the more worthy and “high-toned” among the reformers of the present religious conditions of India are, when faced by those powerful and widespreading tendencies of which I first spoke, a scattered and feeble folk. They are also themselves so far influenced by these same opposing tendencies as to be too much divided and, as a rule, somewhat deficient in hope and in courage. Anyone who knows what prolonged life in India is, with its depressing climate and other physical and social discouragements to efficient reform, will not be surprised at this. Yet the truth seems to me to be that, slowly, and “here a little and there a little,” a real and great

betterment of an ethical and religious sort is taking place. In proof of this opinion I might instance—not statistics, of which there are surely enough about India, and the meaning of which few of those even who gather and publish them really comprehend—but impressions derived from personal observation and from conversation with the promoters of reform. Not to mention other names, I will venture to refer to Professor Bhandarkar, that most sincere, intelligent, and influential advocate of a reformed theism. Any thoroughly Christian thinker could scarcely find elsewhere a man with whom to establish more points of agreement and of sympathy than with him, on all the great ethical and spiritual themes that enter into the very substance of our religion. Or suppose that one seeks, not so much credible theological and religious belief as the life that is patterned after the founder of Christianity, both as respects its motive and its example. A more thoroughly Christlike work of reform has rarely been undertaken than that for which stands the name of that Parsi gentleman, Mr. Malabari—God bless him!—in his self-denying labors for the relief and elevation of Hindu women. So, also, among the missionaries of the Brahma Samaj in Calcutta there are a “good few” (*few*, indeed, compared with the 290,000,000 of India) to whom any most sincere and cautious Christian may extend the name and hand of “a brother.” Nor are such wholly wanting among the orthodox Hindus in other places. When to these, and such as these, we add the influence for the reform of religious faith and life exercised by such pronounced Christians among the educated men as Mr. Kali Banurji, of Calcutta, we have a band—small and too much, of necessity, divided indeed—that nevertheless requires recognition as an increasingly powerful tendency.

It would not be right, moreover, to neglect the yet more indirect influence upon the present religious condition of India which comes from the local, as well as the more extensive, efforts of the natives of India to introduce certain reforms in the domestic and social life of the people. It has already been made sufficiently clear how intimately connected these matters are with the religious beliefs of the people. Not marrying or

burying according to custom may be for the Hindu a potent factor in determining Karma; and killing a starved cow for its hide, in famine times and when the man is himself starving, may involve his eternal damnation. But if reform begins at the other end, as it were, and your custom in marrying or burying is made more sanitary and reasonable, or the bodies of cows are, in fact, treated as though they were of less value than the souls of men, there is pretty sure to follow some reactionary effect upon the connected religious belief. There is much debate about matters of social reform in India just now. Two parties are forming, the one conservative and the other more radical and bent on extensive changes. This is the customary experience. The conservatives are still far stronger and more numerous; they have in command most of the vested interests. And even the government is, in most cases, mainly on their side. But certain reforms are soon coming; and more reforms are sure to follow. These all tend to alter, by inevitable reaction upon them, the religious beliefs and practices of the people. If, then, the Brahmans find all this good, truth, and improved conduct in their own ancient books, and so adapt their own religions as to include the higher faith and better practice, the lover of God and mankind, the true Christian, will give the thanks and the glory to the divine Source of all good.

Finally, in the fourth place, there are tendencies which, at any time under favorable physical and social conditions, may sweep away vast numbers of the people from their ancient, native religions into the changed name at least of the *Christian* faith and manner of life. Hinduism is no "good news" for the millions of the common people. It was its upward lift of pity and sympathy which carried the multitudes centuries ago into Buddhism, as *their* religion; although as designed and promulgated by its founder Buddhism was no *religion* at all. But what shall the "poor man" do in India today—the man who is "poor" beyond all our American conceptions of the utmost extreme of poverty? His choice is, in general, starvation or dependency, if he changes his religion; and it may be both. He is, therefore, cheaply to be bought for a nominal adherence to your

faith. By the judicious distribution of a few *pice*, for example, Dr. Valentine, of Agra, gathered a regular congregation (a so-called "Beggars' Church") which averaged more than eight hundred; but the fifty sincere converts made among them could not be baptized, since after baptism no Mohammedan would either employ or give alms to them. During the famine of 1897 this same Christian missionary relieved, with funds from England and America, "103,144 famine-stricken ones." Yet larger similar work has been done by Dr. Robert A. Hume at Ahmednagar during the past two years of yet sorer famine. Such friendly assistance creates in India a tendency.

Millions of "rice Christians" can now be had in India, for the tendency is strong, and gathering strength, toward a religion that furnishes something for both body and soul to feed upon; in it one may at least live physically, and also have some hope and cheer dawn upon the life of the soul both here and in the hereafter. To have a religion that allows the poor soul to pass out of existence altogether is an improvement upon the popular Brahmanism. To have a religion that promises a life which is worth the having—this is, if it could be credited at all, an inspiration under which even the inescapable physical burdens of the lower classes in that vast and mysterious continent might be lightly borne, or at least accepted with more than characteristic native resignation and patience. What will ultimately be its outcome, should the physical and social environment become distinctly more favorable to this tendency on the part of the multitudes of India, it is not easy to predict. It may grow into an irresistible, an overwhelming impulse.

There are two remarks of practical import which I wish, in closing, briefly to emphasize. For the religious enlightenment of the more intelligent and educated of the Hindus in India it is not only useless, but also mischievous, to employ men who have not the very finest equipment of reflective thinking and scholarly culture. Flattery and polemics are apt to be alike unavailing for the real improvement of their religious condition. The one fosters their pride; the other tends to increase misunderstanding and bitterness. For the religious elevation of the millions of

common people, however, nothing else is, in my judgment, so important at the present time as the establishment of self-supporting, self-respecting *industrial Christian communities*. In order to be self-respecting, they must become self-supporting. In order to become self-supporting, they must be founded by the support of the Christian well-wishers of India.

For both classes, and for all classes, now in India, as at all times in all places, the *life* which plainly shows the spirit of Jesus is the great reforming, purifying, and uplifting religious tendency.